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Chapter 15, Tradition and Change Among the  
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## Tradition and Change Among the Pastoral Harasiis in Oman<sup>1</sup>

*Dawn Chatty*

So little social science had been conducted in the central desert of Oman that, as late as 1980, one writer had only this to say about the Harasiis: "Information about the way of life here and about the tribe of the Harasiis which inhabits the area is very limited, although it is thought that the small nomadic groups pursue camel herding exclusively and engage in periodic movements . . . but little is known about these people" (Scholz and Cordes 1980:11). In 1981 I began a 24-month anthropological study in the region, the government of Oman having instructed me to examine the felt needs and problems of that population and to design and implement practical social programs to meet those needs. The government desired to raise the standard of living of the population "without undermining its traditional way of life" (Chatty 1984:2) or forcing it to settle and join the agricultural communities of north and south Oman. The regime wanted to extend the same basic services to the pastoral populations of its central desert that it had developed in most of the rural regions since the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur in 1971. The government did not entertain the expedient of settling these pastoral nomads, nor, for that matter, the idea of developing their pastoral marketing system, but it built a tribal center at Haima—a complex of buildings with a police station, a reverse osmosis water plant, a mosque, and a petrol station—and appointed a *wali*<sup>2</sup> as its representative to run it.

My preliminary recommendations were to implement immediately the same fundamental health, education, and welfare services in the Jiddat as existed in the rest of the country. Within three years (1981–1984), mobile primary health care, limited curative services, educational facilities, veterinary services, and welfare services were instituted for these highly mobile people. As these programs based at the Haima Center maintained significant outreach sectors, Haima soon became the administrative focus of the tribe. The sudden availability of petrol and sweet water alone drew tribespeople to Haima. Once they were there, the newly formed government programs and services

attracted their attention. Now, access to government personnel for services and for the resolution of disputes that used to be handled exclusively among Harasiis themselves, is beginning to erode an identity based solely on tribal membership, and replace it with a broader one that also includes membership in the Omani state. In this chapter I will briefly describe the Harasiis tribe as it was before modern government services were first introduced and as it is now. I will, in this fashion, indicate how the Harasiis sense of identity has been modified in just a very few years.

The Northern Mountains, the Southern Mountains, and the Central Desert Plateau, a flat limestone slab called the Jiddat-il-Harasiis (see Figure 15.1), comprise three distinct geological zones within the land area of the Sultanate of Oman. The eastern boundary of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis is an escarpment that drops into the Huqf depression and is, in places, a hundred meters high. To the north, the Jiddat gradually changes into the gravel fan of the Northern Mountains and, to the northwest, it comes up against the southern finger of the Rub'a al-Khali sand dunes. Its western boundary is marked by a gradual transition into the rolling plains heralding the Southern Mountains. The Jiddat itself is particularly flat with very few ridges or outcrops of more than ten meters. Its most conspicuous features are the scattered depressions, called *haylat*, which vary in size from 1 to 25 hectares. The surface of the Jiddat is *hammada*, made up of rock, pebble, and coarse sand. Stanley Price (1988, IV:4-7) describes the region's central climatic characteristics.

The Jiddat's proximity to the Arabian Sea mitigates some of the extremes of climate associated with most deserts. June is the hottest month, with an average shade maximum of 43.4°C and daily extremes of 47° or 48°C. The coolest months are December, January, and February with monthly maxima of 26°C to 27°C and an average minimum of 11.4°C in January. In addition to great changes in temperature between months, there is a daily fluctuation of as much as 15° to 20°C. Relative humidity can vary between less than 10 percent and saturation in the course of 24 hours in winter or in summer. Rain tends to fall in late winter and spring and, very exceptionally, in summer.

An almost daily sea breeze between March and October can cause air temperatures to drop as much as 10°C in ten minutes, while relative humidity rapidly increases. If this breeze drops to below 8 knots after midnight, the moist cool air condenses and forms a fog bank at ground level. When the stronger sea breezes between June and September prevent the moist air mass from descending to ground level, fogs are less common.

The mean annual rainfall of 50 mm and the amount of moisture available from the fogs determine the vegetation cover. The density of trees on the Jiddat is remarkable for a desert. The *Acacia tortilis* is the most widespread tree, while in the sandy depressions and in all *haylats* *A. ehrenbergiana* is common. In *haylats* with deeper sand accumulations, single trees of *Prosopis cineraria* grow, some reaching 15 or 20 meters in height. These trees can grow on the Jiddat despite the low rainfall because of fog moisture. Even

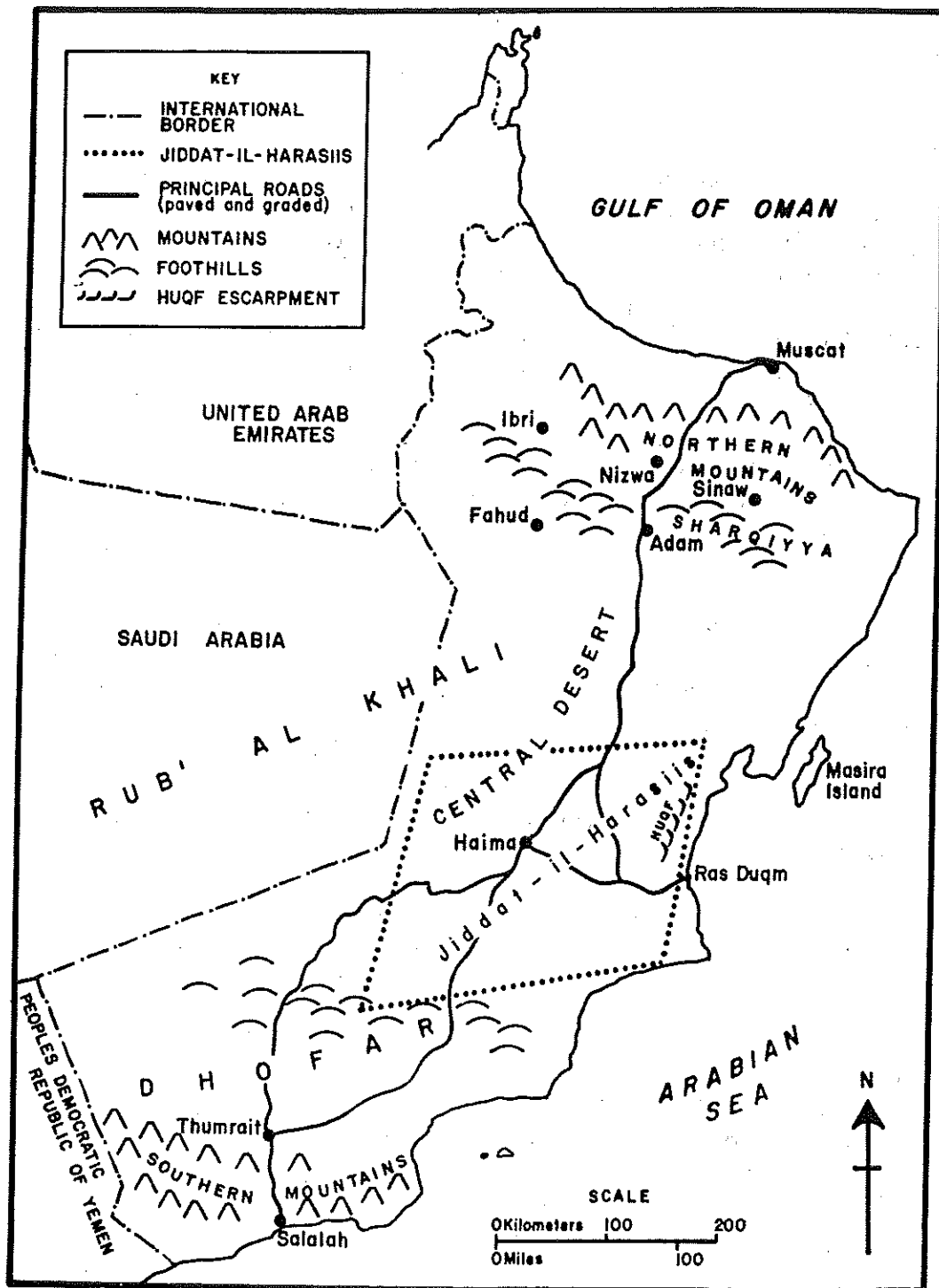


FIGURE 15.1

Sultanate of Oman. Source: Adapted from *Oman and Its Renaissance* by Sir Donald Hawley, Stacey International Publishers, London 1977. Prepared by Jane S. Davis.

in the absence of rain, bursts of green leaf may occur at all times of the year. When air temperatures are moderate and fogs most common, during March-April and again in September, growth is stimulated and grasses flower in response to the moisture. Thus the prime ecological consequence of the fog is that the Jiddat has a level of primary production twice a year even without rain.

A small population, the Harasiis tribe, lives on the Jiddat. These pastoralists, who appear to have been originally a Dhofari tribe, speak a modern south Arabian language known as Harsuusi. According to Harsuusi oral tradition, the original section of the tribe was Beit Afarri, living in Wadi Kadrit between Salalah and Hadramaut. Over the past few hundred years, the Harasiis have gradually pushed—and been pushed—northeast into the Jiddat. As they moved into the various wadis that mark the natural geographic borders of the Jiddat floor, they have come up against other pastoral tribes—the Jeneba to the east along the Jazir Coast, and the Wahiba to the north in the Wadi Halfayn. Unable to push farther, the Harasiis today are mainly concentrated on the desert plateau itself, although in the summer they are found sharing the Awta and Jazir Coast with the Jeneba tribe (see Figure 15.2).

They raise camels and goats on natural forage for the production of milk.<sup>3</sup> Migration, structured by a combination of seasonal and ecological variables in the location of pasture and water, ensures survival of both herds and herders as they move from deficit to surplus areas throughout the year. Territory is important among the Harasiis. They seek to control a region that contains sufficient resources to sustain communal life. Tending to live in haylats or wadis where trees can be found under which to shelter and where browse and graze is plentiful, they determine their territorial frontiers loosely as running along the floor of the Wadi Rawnab to the south and east of Rima, along the middle of Wadi Haytam to the northeast, up to the general region of the Harashiif dunes to the north, and across to the Ramlat-as-Sahmah to the west. They share borders with the Jeneba on the east, with the Wahiba and Duru' to the north, and the Beit Kathir on the south.

These borders are in constant flux. Over the past three decades the seasonal availability of pasture and water has undergone a pronounced geographic shift from southwest to northeast, requiring readjustment of relations with the Mahra, Jeneba and Wahiba. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s various texts and oral traditions placed the territory of the Harasiis as extending from the Jiddat-il-Harasiis westward to Mughshin-al-Ayn and Bir Khasfah where they were said to have watering agreements with the Mahra and Bataaharah. Since that time, the territory has slowly moved eastward, so that during the 1980s disputes have tended to focus on water rights along borders shared with the Jeneba in the Wadi Rawnab, Wadi Halfayn, and Wadi Baw.

In the past, access to water for the Harasiis was extremely limited. Tribal tradition had it that they never drank water, but lived almost entirely on the milk from their camel and goat herds. Their cultural explanation for

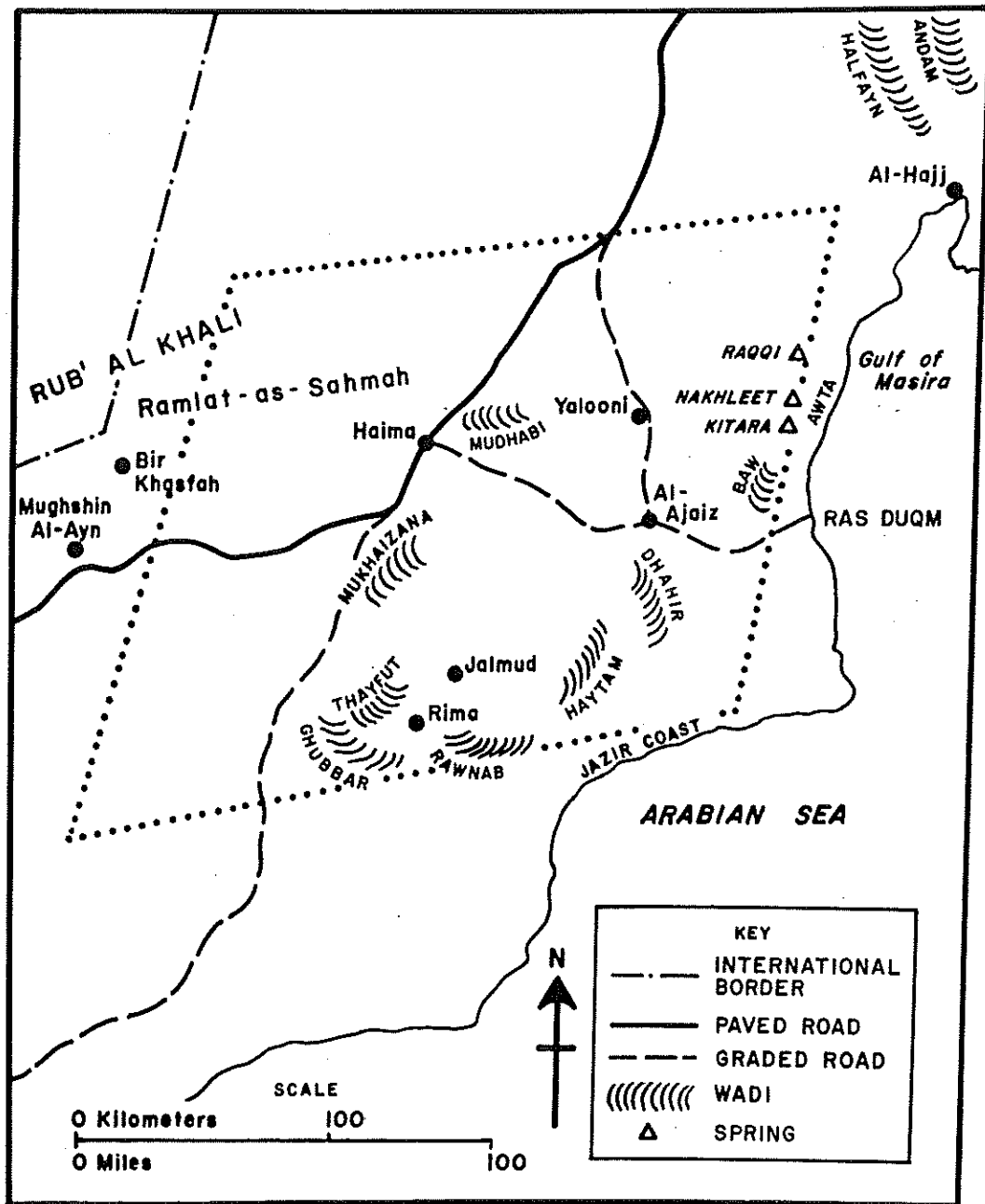


FIGURE 15.2

Jiddat-il-Harasiis. Source: Adapted from *Oman and Its Renaissance* by Sir Donald Hawley, Stacey International Publishers, London 1977. Prepared by Jane S. Davis.

this reflects geographic truth. Until the 1960s there was no source of sweet water on the Jiddat floor. Marginally potable water was found only along the Awta, the lowlands of the Huqf escarpment lying just along the coast of Oman from Duqm north toward al-Hajj. There, a series of springs is found (Raqqi, Nakhleet, Baw), probably recent rain runoff that has percolated through the limestone. These springs are heavily mineralized, yielding water that is barely potable even under extreme conditions, but the unique feature of a heavy, early-morning fog frequently provided the herds with sufficient moisture for their needs. These herds then provided the human population with enough milk for its nutritional requirements.

### Economic Character of Traditional Life

The following information is extracted from a series of surveys and interviews of a random sample of 10 percent of Harasiis households made in 1982, prior to setting up government services for the tribe.

The Harasiis tribe is made up of approximately 2,000 people. Households are generally extended family units, the average family being composed of nine members. At the core of the household is the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children. Generally two to three adult relatives of one degree or another make up the rest of the family unit: grandparent, in-laws, cousins.<sup>4</sup> On average, a household keeps a hundred goats and a few sheep that are the responsibility of the women. Twice-daily milking and regular herding are undertaken by the women and older girls. Decisions over breeding and culling are generally taken by men, though sale of goats is always a joint decision—particularly as it is the women who own them. The average household keeps 25 camels of which 5 or 6 heavily pregnant or lactating females are generally kept near the homestead. The remainder of the camels are left *mafkooh*, free to graze in the open desert. (Their whereabouts are carefully monitored, and an elaborate camel information exchange system operates among all the tribesmen. On meeting, tribesmen first exchange news about the conditions of the pasture, then the whereabouts of various *mafkooh* camels, and finally news items of various family members.) Homesteads are generally moved a significant distance three or four times a year. Homesteads whose household heads are employed locally tend to make minimal adjustments to their campsite location in between the major moves. A full-time husbandman, though, will shift his homestead a few kilometers every few weeks to ensure that the family herd of goats and sheep does not exhaust what graze exists around the campsite.

### Household Subsistence

Basic to the organization of all pastoral communities is the existence of sedentary communities in adjacent areas, and access to their agricultural products. In Oman, relations of interdependence bind the pastoral nomads to the sedentary communities along the Sharqiyya foothills. The pastoralists bring animals to auction in the village marketplace; pots and trays for repair

at the local coppermiths; and palm frond mats, bowls, baskets, and ghee for sale. At the same time they purchase the comestibles necessary for their families and herds. (Since 1983, during periods of drought, they have been buying dried feed, either third grade wheat chafings or hay—rhodes grass—for camels and goats.) For generations this relationship, largely uncomplicated by external factors, bound the Harasiis of Central Oman to the villages of the Sharqiyya foothills—particularly Adam and Sinaw—in an economic partnership. The cash economy of the village was reinforced by the continual influx of “capital on the hoof.” Transactions were completed and money changed hands. Significantly, though, when the final purchases were made, the bulk of the money had simply moved from one end of the market to another—from the animal buyer’s pocket to the merchant’s till. For the Harasiis, the relationship with the villages reinforced not an exchange but a domestic economy. For example, the individual Harasiis tribesman may have sold two goats for forty Maria Theresa thalers, and then spent this exact amount for flour, coffee, tea, dates, sugar, and clothing for his family. His long treks to the village markets were motivated not by profit but by the need for some basic household item.

### *The Traditional Universe*

The universe of the Harasiis was limited to the Jiddat floor. The long treks for supplies could take anywhere from 5 to 15 days. Adam, then Sinaw and Nizwa were the primary trading centers, with Salalah a distant third choice. On occasion, long journeys for medical care were undertaken to other Gulf States, sometimes as far as Kuwait. One individual is recorded as having emigrated to the Trucial Coast in search of an education, returning to the Jiddat twenty years later as a well-trained English-speaking nurse with the rank of colonel in the United Arab Emirates’ Air Force. But such instances are rare. To the tribesmen as a whole, the Jiddat-il-Harasiis was the world. The tribe of about four hundred “arms bearing” men was organized into seven subgroups or lineages each called *buyut* (singular, *beit*). These seven lineages (Beit Aksit, Mutaira, Barho, Sha’ala, Aloob, Afarri, Katherayn) were divided into two main factions, one headed by the Beit Aksit and the other by the Beit Mutaira. The leadership of the tribe as a whole lay with the Beit Aksit, whose ancestral forebear is acknowledged to have united the disparate units into one tribe about 150 years ago. Each lineage generally recognized two spokesmen who acted on its behalf. These men were called *rashiid* (plural, *rushada’*) and represented the lineage in discussions concerning the welfare of the tribe. The pivotal position among the *rushada’* was that of the sheikh. He traditionally enjoyed a vast and ill-defined field of privileges and annually journeyed to Salalah to receive a gift from the sultan and, on occasion, to ask the sultan to adjudicate. For the individual Harsuusi tribesman, however, contact with others was limited, by and large, to members of other pastoral tribes such as the Jeneba, the Wahiba, the Duru’, and the Mahra. The regular treks for supplies to villages along the borders of the desert were about as far a trip as the Harsuusi



individual experienced. He had no knowledge of the political struggles in the north between the imam and the sultan and between the Hinai and Ghafiri, or in the south between the feuding tribes of Dhofar. The Harasiis, one of four pastoral tribes in Oman, was the only one not drawn into the several struggles to topple the sultan. The individual's identity as a Harsuusi tribesman was continually reinforced by the geographic remoteness of the homeland, its inaccessibility, and the almost total political isolation in which the tribe functioned.

### **Petroleum Exploration, Exploitation, and Employment**

#### *Petroleum and Politics*

In 1954 an exploratory party of the national oil company, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), made its way from the southern coast of Oman at Duqm into the Central Oman Steppes. There contact was made with the sheikhs of the Duru' tribe who agreed to allow PDO to prospect in their territory. The oil company needed to establish a system of labor recruitment and supervision effectively to exploit the oil promise in the area, but the request was completely foreign to the local people. Although tribal leaders were accustomed to acting as political mediators on behalf of their tribesmen, PDO's mixed political and economic needs were novel to them. At first, internal jealousies divided the tribal sections, and subunits or lineage leaders took to claiming the exclusive right to furnish labor for PDO, for which there was a significant reward.

In 1958 PDO began to prepare for a new drilling location at Haima. There was fear that the Jeneba tribesmen might claim the region as their own, though Haima was normally used by the Harasiis and was far from any disputable border. Four years earlier, when PDO had first landed at Duqm, Salim bin Huweila, a minor lineage leader, had been on the beach to greet the advance party. His curiosity and opportunism kept him close by, and whenever the oil company required the services of a local he was there ready to serve. After consultation with Sultan Said bin Taimur, PDO decided to search for a labor supervisor from the Harasiis, and Salim bin Huweila was appointed shortly thereafter. Following some labor unrest, both Salim and the traditional leader, Sheikh Shergi, were sent to Salalah to confer with the sultan.<sup>5</sup> They were to remain in Salalah for six months before being allowed to return to the Jiddat once the labor unrest had died down. Over the next decade, PDO was to play off the two men against each other, though their differences were more stylistic than ideological. The oil company found Salim to be a man of "charm and great personality," while Sheikh Shergi was pejoratively described in the same PDO field reports as a "small, greedy, little man." When Salim became too demanding or too difficult, PDO would turn to Sheikh Shergi. When Sheikh Shergi began to make "outrageous" requests—generally for water—they would ask that the sultan allow them to ignore Sheikh Shergi and return to dealing

with Salim. Finally, in 1968, having had a great deal of trouble with Salim—despite his charm—PDO requested that the sultan allow it to deal with Sheikh Shergi for labor supervision. This was accepted by the sultan, but refused by Sheikh Shergi, who by this time had begun to make overtures for support from Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Harthi, the powerful Minister of Interior. Sheikh Ahmed had a strong and growing following in the Sharqiyya region of Oman, which Sultan Said bin Taimur was unhappy about. It was reported in a number of PDO papers that the sultan was willing to allow Sheikh Ahmed his power base so long as he did not try to extend it south into the Jiddat. The underlying consideration was twofold: first, the sultan was very concerned that the traditional Hinai/Ghafiri power struggle not spill out of northern Oman and that Sheikh Ahmed's growing Hinai following be contained; and second, Sultan Said bin Taimur seemed to regard the Jiddat as well as Dhofar as his private reserve more than as a region of the country. When the sultan learned that Sheikh Shergi had refused "to act without directions from Qabil" (home base of Sheikh Ahmed), he angrily removed the sheikh from office and appointed Salim bin Huweila as the "new" sheikh of the Harasiis (PDO 1948-1975:1974:3). This arrangement worked well for the company but was never acceptable to the tribesmen nor, of course, to Sheikh Shergi, who bided his time.

In 1972, two years after his accession, Sultan Qaboos bin Said reinstated Sheikh Shergi and removed Salim bin Huweila, much to the dismay of PDO where his services had come to be appreciated. The decade of PDO and government interference in Harasiis tribal political organization had come to a close, but not without some loss of confidence by tribesmen in their authority figures. The Harasiis were suddenly exposed to a world far removed from their own reality, but of which they were reluctantly a part. They were no longer simple Harasiis pastoralists making a living in the barren and isolated Jiddat-il-Harasiis. They had become an Omani people occupying a greatly sought-after territory.

After 1970, the government of Oman and the national oil company entered central Oman with two major interests bearing on the Harasiis. First, fixed and stable boundaries had to be established. Second, permanent and reliable individuals from each tribe had to be selected to manage the hiring of laborers. The already fragile tribal political system, which had barely coped with earlier government interference, disintegrated, and Harasiis tribal authority in the person of Sheikh Shergi hardly existed. His past experience with the old sultan seems to have broken his willingness to do anything other than better himself and his own family. When, for example, the *rushada'* asked him to see the sultan and plead for another water tanker (in the period between 1975 and 1985), he would do so, but when the tanker arrived he would claim it for his own exclusive use. After his third tanker, in 1981, there was much muttering among the *rushada'*. Finally a meeting of all the tribal leaders was called in the office of the wali, to establish whether Sheikh Shergi had enough support to remain their leader. For lack of agreement on a successor, they did not replace him, but as a

result of that attempted coup, Sheikh Shergi gave the next water tanker he received from the sultan to a kinsman, with the proviso that he actually distribute water among all the buyut. This accommodation did not last long, and within a few months the tanker was used exclusively for that one family. More and more individuals were going into Muscat and requesting interviews with various ministers (most often the Minister of Water and Electricity) to make requests to better their families, sometimes their beit, and only incidentally the tribe as a whole (as when the government installed reverse osmosis water plants in the region, after repeated individual requests for them). The annual trips to pay respects to the sultan continued, but to the individual tribesmen the sheikh was no longer an effective mediator or broker of their affairs with the world outside of the tribes. Traditional concerns such as pasture allocation and territorial rights remained communal issues within the beit and among the rushada' of the tribe, but the new concerns centering around paid employment with PDO and various government agencies were issues that each man handled on his own.

#### *Pastoralism and Wage Labor*

Economically the Harasiis tribe fared far better. From the moment in 1954 when oil exploration teams came ashore at Duqm, a new universe opened. Each of the oil company activities opened up new employment opportunities, and tribesmen quickly adapted to the routine—if not always the discipline—of the company. As more and more men took jobs as guides, drivers, guards, and manual laborers, their salaries became an increasingly important factor in the economic interplay between the desert and the village. In many cases, a man's salary began to replace revenues from animal sales as the main source of purchasing power. At first, animal sales declined and herd size increased, but by the early 1980s this process was checked by disease, a long period of drought, and the low carrying capacity of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis.

The activities of the oil exploration teams, the development of camps, the setting up of rigs, the opening up of wells, and later, petroleum exploitation were accompanied by tremendous infrastructural changes. Graded roads replaced tracks, and in 1981 a tarmac highway was opened, running through the center of the Jiddat and connecting the north and the south of the country for the first time. The 5-to-15-day journey across the desert by camel became a thing of the past. In 1974 the first Harsuusi-owned half-ton truck appeared on the Jiddat. Within five years nearly every Harsuusi household had one or more trucks. In our sample only one household head did not own a vehicle, but each of his three adult sons had one, and they alternated in procuring water, animal feed, and comestibles for their father's household, and in transporting his livestock to market. Journeys to town centers were no longer measured by days, but hours; six hours to Nizwa, eight to Muscat, seven to Salalah.

With the commencement of oil exploration and later exploitation on the margins of the Jiddat floor, the world for the Harasiis came to be quite

radically altered. No longer was their concern uniquely with household subsistence, herd well-being, and pasture. Now wage labor came to be an important reality. The nature of employment on the Jiddat often required that the adult male household head be away from the family unit for weeks at a time. During such absences from the household, another male relative would often take over the vacant economic role, and would see to it that the household was provided with sufficient water, milk, animal feed, and other necessities. Even unrelated households camping in the same haylat or close to each other tended to help each other.

The new oil employment did not require men to migrate. Because their jobs remained within the borders of the Jiddat, they could still keep a distant eye on family and herd from their posts. Furthermore, the terms of employment were favorable, allowing men long stretches at home—two weeks on duty followed by one week off being fairly standard practice. Thus, though traditional patterns changed to keep pace with new factors in their environment, they were not yet breaking down. For example, milking camels was strictly a male preserve. Today, when the male head of the family is away at his job, a relative or close family friend will always endeavor to milk the household camels for the family's use. Only when no man is available will a woman do the milking herself.

As early as 1982, our surveys of the Harasiis population showed, 82 percent of the sampled households had some form of income beyond the sale of animals. Households where men were employed full-time had, on the average, 35 percent fewer camels and 25 percent fewer goats than did households with no outside salary. These same households revealed a surprisingly low incidence of sales of livestock, perhaps because of the demands of full-time employment as well as the distances between producer and market—easily 1,000 kilometers for a round trip. So while employment might seem to have inhibited regular sales of livestock and thereby accelerated graze depletion, the effect has been the opposite. The families whose heads are employed full-time have cut back on their herds, and thus employment has had a beneficial effect on grazing.

Probably the most profoundly altered factor in the tribesman's daily life has been his access to water. Before 1955, water was available only on the Awta. The practice of collecting water from the heavy morning fog was widespread. Water requirements had to be kept to a minimum. Four-fifths of a family's camels might be left mafkook, or on the loose to graze, with only the pregnant or lactating camels kept at the homestead. The traditional Harasiis goat, a short-haired white animal, was particularly adapted to the region, drinking no water in wintertime and very little in summer. Then, at some time during the reign of Sultan Said bin Taimur (probably during the 1960s), long-haired black goats from the north began to appear on the Jiddat, probably the result of successive human migrations north to Wadi Halfayn and Wadi Andam during droughts on the Jiddat. These black-haired goats were less suited to aridity and required greater quantities of water, but they were locally perceived as being a more marketable, fatter animal,



and their meat was more widely appreciated in the market towns of northern Oman.

Over the last few decades the Harasiis had been pushed back from the coastal regions by the Jenaba tribe until they are now restricted to the Jiddat floor itself. Fortunately, their access to water has not been entirely cut off. Almost as though responding to the needs of the Harasiis, the national oil company arrived on the Jiddat in the mid-1950s and drilled water wells at Haima and Al-Ajaiz. By agreement with the government, these wells were left in operation after the exploration teams moved to more promising fields. In the 1960s, the Al-Ajaiz well served as a migratory magnet for the Harasiis. By the mid-1970s most families had purchased half-ton pickup trucks and were able to move further afield to areas of better graze particularly for their more water-dependent herds of black goats. Three times a week, and sometimes five, the household head would make a trip to the nearest well to bring water for his family and herds. The average family required 14 drums of water in winter and 21 in summer. Using half-ton pickup trucks that carry only four drums at a time—each with a capacity to hold 209 liters—a man bringing water for his family and herds could easily drive 500 kilometers a week for water alone.

The Harasiis share with other tribes several water wells located on borders, such as the well at Ghubbar, southwest of Rima, that is shared with the Mahra and the well at Rawnab that is shared with the Jeneba. But until 1984, an area of almost 40,000 square kilometers had only one uncontested source of sweet water and another of brackish water. Since then, fortunately, several reverse osmosis plants have been built by the government at such points as Wadi Mudhabi, Wadi Haytam and Wadi Dhahir for the pastoralists to use.

Since the first oil exploration teams landed at Duqm in 1954, the traditional patterns of exchange among Harasiis households have altered dramatically. The new employment opportunities have meant, in many cases, wages replacing livestock as the primary source of purchasing power. With the introduction of the vehicle on the Jiddat in the early 1970s, the economic balance was upset even further. Instead of sales of goats increasing to meet the new costs of operating a vehicle, the opposite appears to have happened, for sales decreased. Camels are sold only when a major purchase such as a wedding must be financed. Modern employment, which by its very nature removes the men from the household for weeks at a stretch, has decreased the amount of time available for managing the herd. Although men do keep a "distant eye" on the herd, they have to put off, alter, or reconsider many management decisions in the light of their work-shift obligations. Debt management seems to have replaced herd management as the answer to new revenue requirements. While increased borrowing and lending contribute to greater social cohesion within the tribe, the extension of credit to the Harasiis from outsiders has not worked—as Harasiis defaulters on installment-scheme purchases are discovering.

The arrival of the national oil company in the Jiddat, the employment opportunities on site for the Harasiis, the road network and wells dug by

the company and later by the government, the rapid introduction and acceptance of the half-ton truck for transport, all these factors and events have forced the Harasiis to recognize and relate to a reality beyond their traditional borders. That reality is the national government, (*hukume*).

As few as five years ago, the term *hukume* and even Oman meant little more to a Harsuusi tribesman than something and someplace far away, beyond his tribal lands. Today the Harsuusi individual has come in contact with government services and with the concept of *hukume* as being an entity greater than himself or his tribe, from which much assistance can be extracted. Health services, educational opportunities, water, and welfare for the poor, crippled, widowed, or orphaned, all are accepted and appreciated.<sup>6</sup> The Harasiis are beginning to understand the *hukume* as representing them as well as various other populations within the country. They are coming to see themselves as not just Harasiis tribesmen but also as one of a number of peoples who make up the Sultanate of Oman. They are coming to expect that what other Omani have, they should have. Thus today it is not unusual to find Harsuusi individuals sitting in ministerial waiting rooms with petitions for increased government services: more health care, water, schools, tents, more of anything that would make life easier. The other side of the coin, service or loyalty to the nation, has not yet become part of the Harasiis frame of reference. Still today they tend to turn to the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf States when satisfaction from the *hukume* has not been complete. An individual unsatisfied by the *hukume* would travel to the UAE to receive whatever was originally demanded (most often health-related), and once satisfied, return to the Jiddat. The crude political awareness the Harasiis have developed recently leaves much to be desired, but it is early days, and time can only deepen the individual's understanding of the multisided nature of national as opposed to tribal identity.

Harasiis identity at one level is shifting from a communal to an individual one. Though the allocation of water and pasture remains an important concern at the level of households and *buyut*, other, new concerns are imposing themselves upon the consciousness of the individual—matters like private debts, schooling for children, local leasing contracts for water bowsters (tank trucks) and other heavy vehicles. At another level, there is an incipient shift from a tribal to a national identity, a shift toward "government" as something greater and more powerful than the tribe, something that can get things done. These two trends are part of the same process: the gradual decline in the importance of the tribe as the individual Harsuusi increasingly incorporates himself into the modern nation-state.

### Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published under the title, "The Harasiis: Pastoralists in a Petroleum Exploited Environment," in *Nomadic Peoples* (Chatty 1987).

2. A wali is a government-appointed administrator for a *wilayat* or region of the country. Each wali was meant to undermine and challenge the authority of the

traditional sheikhs in his region. And with the wealth and power of the government behind him, each has succeeded.

3. Young male goats and camels are either sold or slaughtered and consumed locally within the first four or five months after birth.

4. Polygynous households accounted for less than 10 percent of our sample. Though permitted by Islam, the economic realities of life make it a rare occurrence. When a Harsuusi male has more than one wife, each woman maintains her own homestead.

5. In this case, items had been found missing from PDO stores. Salim bin Huweila refused to allow PDO to search the baggage of Harasiis laborers leaving the camp on discharge. Sheikh Shergi took his side and a general strike of Harasiis laborers was threatened.

6. Negative aspects to these new benefits, such as corruption and graft, are seen as produced by individuals and are not lumped as part of the character of the government.

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